

Epiphany 4 1/31/21  
Mark 1:21-28 B

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY,  
FROM THE 1<sup>ST</sup> CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

My Dear Friends in Christ, I'm going to begin sermon with a question, a question for you. But, before I do, allow me a short trip down memory lane.

Back in the days of my youth, the highlight of the week was watching All Star Wrestling, hosted by Mean Gene Hanson, on Saturday afternoon. You lived for it. All Star Wrestling was the ultimate clash of good vs. evil. The epic battle of virtue and decency vs. wickedness and decadence. You had the American Dream, Dusty Rhodes, battle the vile, arrogant Superstar Billy Graham. There was the Crusher – what can be more Americana than a guy named “the Crusher” who would walk around with a beer keg on his shoulder – vs. Baron von Roschke. And we cannot forget Chief Wahoo McDaniel – complete with headdress – wrestling one of the Anderson brothers, the one half of the wicked Minnesota Wrecking crew. Inevitably, Wahoo would have the upper hand, when the other Anderson brother would jump into the ring and together, they would put the boot to Wahoo. It took both Gene and Lars to defeat Wahoo, and now you know why I call them evil. And, we cannot forget Scrap Iron Gadaski. Every week, week after week, he got beat. My grandmother could've wrestled Scrap Iron and beat him.

Those were the thrilling days of yesterday. And throughout the week, on the playground of Rickard Elementary School, those matches were re-enacted again and again and again. As you painfully aware by now, my world was very small. So small in fact, that we didn't even realize those

matches were all make believe. Even in the farthest recesses of our young minds, we could never have fathomed that All Star Wrestling was just show and tell; it was not real.

My Dear Friends in Christ, in our lesson this Sunday, we have a contest of good vs. evil. The Son of God vs. the unclean spirit. We must not lose sight of the fact that in battling the unclean spirit, Jesus was really battling Satan, the evil one, the father of all lies. As much as some, guided by their human reason, would say this is all make believe; it is not pretend. It is real, very real, with eternal consequences for eternity in the joy of heaven or the fires of hell.

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him (vv. 21-26)

Remember, I said I was going to start the sermon with a question this morning. Well, here it is, here's my question for you: WHERE WAS THE MAN WITH THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT? Answer: He was in the synagogue!

The synagogue was the local house of worship in Judaism. It literally means "house of study," because it was where God's Word (the Old Testament) was read and the rabbis taught what was read. But this "teaching," was so different than anything we have ever heard; that we almost cannot relate to it. You see, what the rabbi would do is just quite a bunch of other rabbis. Something like, "Rabbi Whose-on-first says... And Rabbi What's-on-second writes..." And on and on they babbled. And their

endless babbling was powerless to do anything for that man with the unclean spirit.

But, along came Jesus. He spoke with authority and the demon was defeated. Good triumphed over evil.

And that is Good News for you, Dear Child of God because that demon, the father of all lies, haunts and taunts you. Please hear and understand me correctly, I am not saying you are demon possessed. I call your attention to his lie in the Garden of Eden. The first thing he did was cast doubt on the very words God had spoken, "Did God really say?" (Ge 3:1). So, there you accuser sits, on your shoulder; laying on your Mr. Pillow as you try to sleep, so He can whisper in your ear, "Did God really say?"

God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Je 31:34). But, Satan sure remembers it. And he makes you remember it, so that it still haunts you. And your spouse and your parents, they sure remember your sin.

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid," Jesus says (Jn 14:27). You are troubled. It just feels like the weight of the world is on your shoulders and you are responsible for the well-being of every human being on planet earth.

The Lord of your life speaks, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life," (Mt 6:25). But, the honest truth is you are worried; stewing and fretting; you are scared to death, shaking like a little rabbit.

The Prince of Life speaks these words to you, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn 11:25). What

you are truly afraid of his death and the thought that maybe, just maybe, you will end up in hell.

There's a reason you have that reaction to the words the Lord your God has spoken – the father of lies speaks his lies to you, "You can't trust this. You can't believe this. It's all make believe, just pretend."

God doesn't play that game at all. His Word is true. And so that you would know it was true, He sent His only-begotten Son to speak it to you. And, that Word, that Word became flesh and dwelt among us, to make God known to us (cf. Jn 14 & He 1:2).

The Word-made-flesh said this, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Lk 9:22). He didn't just say that -- He taught that, He lived that, He died that.

He went to Jerusalem, where He was betrayed and arrested and put on trial by the elders and chief priests. He did suffer under Pontius Pilate, after He was declared an enemy of the Roman empire and sentenced to death. He was hauled out to Calvary, where He was nailed to the wood of the cross. With His dying breath, He spoke, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

He spoke and it was done. Your sin is finished. Your death is finished. Your hell is finished. Your accuser and all his lies are finished. And, the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, He rose again from the dead to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation, Dear Child of God.

So, that you can know that is real and not make believe, He spoke the words on Easter evening, "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). His peace really is with you. It is the peace of sins forgiven.

And he says this to you when you feel the weight of the world is on your shoulders, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (He 13:5b).

When you are despairing and depressed, He says, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

When you are anxious and don’t know which way to turn, He speaks these words, “Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pe 5:7).

In the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death, He says this, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom” (1 Tm 4:18).

You can’t argue with those words; you can’t debate them. They are the true Word of God. Be comforted and be cheered, for you fights the One who has all authority, Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.